

Garden Hoses: recommendations for reducing exposure to contaminants

Easy Hose Habits

No matter what type of hose you use, these simple habits can significantly reduce our plants' exposure to contaminants:

- **Store hoses out of direct sunlight.** This can reduce the leaching of contaminants from the hose into the water.
- **Flush the water out.** Is there water sitting in your hose from the last time you used it? Before watering edible and medicinal plants, let the hose run and flush out that water. I give the water a feel as it exits the hose. The temperature often changes from lukewarm to cold as fresh water starts running through.

If You're Buying a New Hose

- **Avoid PVC (vinyl) hoses.** A 2016 Ecology Center study found that PVC hoses often contained “elevated” lead, bromine, antimony, and phthalates (potentially harmful contaminants). These chemicals weren't found in the non-PVC hoses they tested.
- **Polyurethane and rubber hoses labeled “drinking water safe” are better options.** PVC hose packaging often doesn't say what the hose is made out of, but polyurethane and rubber hose labels often do.
- **Look for a lead-free label,** since this should apply to the entire hose. A “lead-free coupling” label isn't ideal, since the rest of the hose may contain lead.
- **Stick with natural rubber:** The Ecology Center's study didn't turn up contaminants of concern in rubber hoses. However, there's a difference between natural vs. synthetic rubber. Synthetic rubber hoses are often made from reused automobile tires (ex. drip irrigation hoses). Tires weren't designed to be a safe resource for edible and medicinal gardens, and they contain potentially harmful contaminants. Choose a natural rubber hose over a synthetic one.

Thanks to the Ecology Center for their 2016 garden hose study, which produced many of these recommendations. Learn more in March 2023's A Nourishing Harvest article: anourishingharvest.com.

Sources:

Bradley, Lucy. “There Are Better Options Than Using Tires in the Garden.” NC Extension. Feb 22, 2019. <https://gardening.ces.ncsu.edu>

Ecology Center. “Garden Hose Study.” June 20, 2016. www.ecocenter.org